

# Why you should never allow your web browser to save your passwords

By Jack Wallen in Security on March 28, 2019, techrepublic.com

When a web browser like Chrome, Firefox or Safari is allowed to store passwords, you're putting your network security at risk.

Play Sound

Passwords. They are the bane of so many users' existence. Yet, they're one of the only ways we have to secure our accounts, and those accounts are frequently compromised. IT pros always harp on users to create secure passwords—to the tune of creating password profiles that demand specific requirements.

And yet, no matter how hard we try to lock down those accounts, they are still vulnerable.

## Why?

First off, even after being constantly warned, users still insist on passwords like 12345 or password. Even when those users employ incredibly complex passwords, there is still a roadblock in the way of enjoying a truly safe networking experiencing. Said roadblock is when a web browser is allowed to store passwords.

Sure, it's convenient. After all, who wants to type a password every single time it's requested? When you make use of a large number of online services, typing a password each time you use said service can disrupt your productivity. And when those passwords are incredibly complex, such that you must use a password manager, efficiency goes out the window.

And yet, even at the expense of productivity, there's a very good reason why you should never allow a web browser to remember your passwords. That reason is how easy it is to view passwords in modern web browsers. Chrome will allow users to view passwords, even without requiring a master password. Firefox, on the other hand, at least requires a master password, but only if one is set (which many users either overlook or aren't aware of its existence). Like Firefox, Safari at least hides passwords behind a user's password. The difference between Firefox and Safari is the password isn't optional in Apple's browser.

## How easy can you view saved passwords?

Let me demonstrate how easy it is to view saved passwords on the three browsers mentioned. Remember, this only works on passwords that are stored by the browser. First, we'll look at Chrome (as it is the most vulnerable). To view saved passwords in Chrome, do the following:

1. Open Chrome.
2. Click the Menu button and select Settings.
3. Scroll to Autofill and click Passwords.
4. Locate the password you want to view and click the "eye" icon (**Figure A**).
5. Enjoy that password.

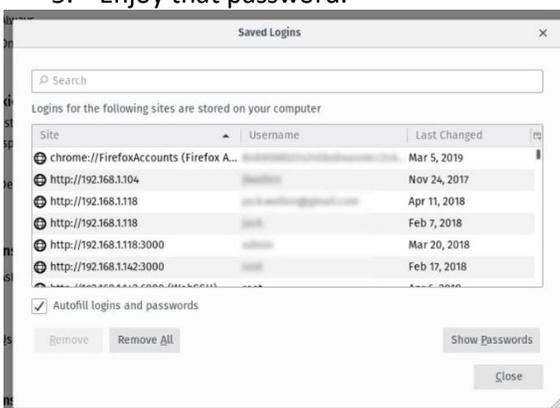


Figure A: Viewing a stored password in Chrome.

To do the same trick in Firefox, do the following:

1. Open Firefox.
2. Open the Menu and select Preferences.
3. Click Privacy & Security (from the left pane).
4. Scroll to Logins & Passwords.
5. Click Saved Logins.

6. Click Show Passwords (**Figure B**).
7. Enjoy your passwords.

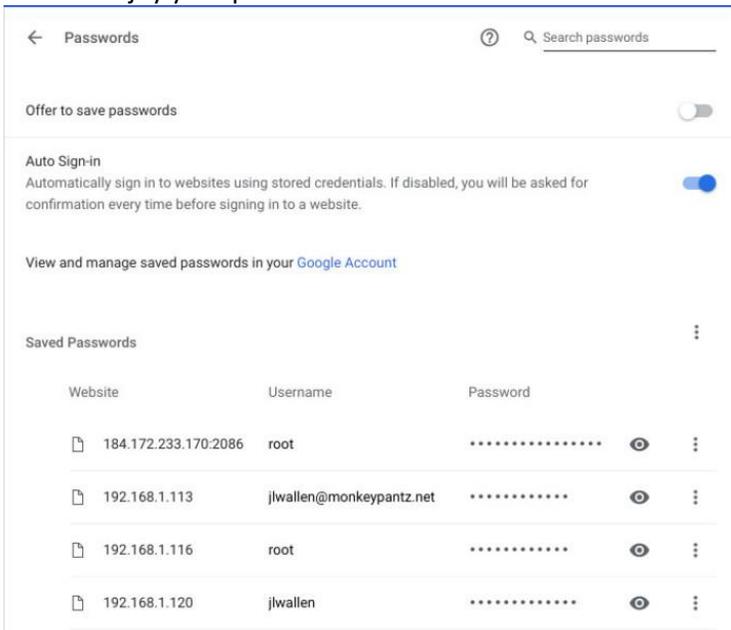


Figure B: Viewing stored passwords in Firefox.

The only caveat to the steps in Firefox is if a Master Password is in use. Should that be the case, you'll be prompted for that password, after clicking Show Passwords. Without the Master Password, you cannot view stored credentials. Now, let's examine Safari. Here are the steps for viewing passwords in Apple's browser.

1. Open Safari.
2. Click the Safari menu in the top bar and select Preferences.
3. Click the Passwords tab.
4. When prompted either type your password, or use the fingerprint sensor (if available).
5. Click on the website you want to view (**Figure C**).
6. Enjoy that password.

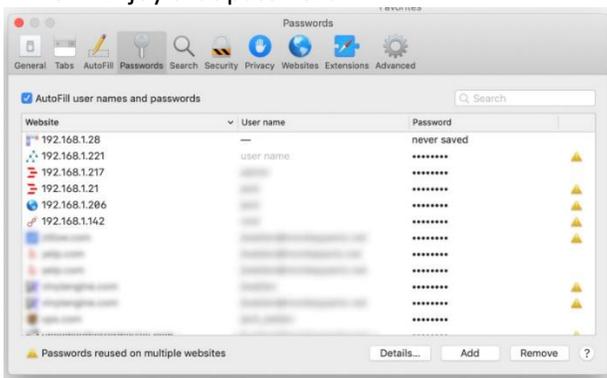


Figure C: Viewing stored passwords in Safari.

Clearly, Safari has the edge here, only because it requires the use of a password to view stored credentials. If Firefox stored credentials are locked by a Master Password, then it puts the Mozilla browser on similar ground. As far as Chrome is concerned, your saved passwords are there for all to see, unfettered and unprotected.

### What to do?

The answer to this question is simple. Don't allow your browser to save your passwords. None of them. Not one. If you do, those passwords are vulnerable. All someone has to do is have access to your computer (remote or physical) and, unless you use Safari or the Master Password feature in Firefox, those passwords are available for anyone to see. If you absolutely must have your browser store your passwords, and you're not using macOS, make sure to use Firefox and enable the Master Password feature. Use Chrome at the peril of your passwords.

In place of having your web browser store your passwords, make use of a password manager. By doing so, the likelihood of someone viewing your passwords is considerably lower. It's not perfect, but it's far better than handing over the security of your passwords to a web browser.

The adage, "Better safe, than sorry," most certainly applies.